

THE

HISTORIAN

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

July 2007

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The July luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, July 19, 2007, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. The speakers will be Steve Garber, Hancock County Sheriff and Buzz Olsen, City Clerk/Director of Administration. Reservations may be made by calling 467-4090. Please call by noon on Wednesday, July 18, 2007, to assure your reservation and to help us plan seating which is limited to sixty people. The price of the lunch is \$7.00 payable at the door. Last month's shrimp salad and blueberry pie were excellent! We look forward to the menu Prima has for us this time.



2007 HALLOWEEN TOUR

We need volunteers to serve as actors, guides, hosts/hostesses, etc., so that this year's Halloween tour will be one of the best ever. If you'd like to volunteer, please call the Kate Lobrano House at 467-4090. A special "thank you" goes out to those of you who have already volunteered!



Beach Boulevard (Front Street) early 1900's

THE HANCOCK BANK BUILDING ON BEACH BOULEVARD

By
Scott Bagley

One of the most photographed spots in Bay St. Louis following Hurricane Katrina was where Main Street meets Beach Boulevard. Although the area is one of the highest points on the entire Gulf Coast, the hurricane did its best to ravage this historical intersection. Storm stricken residents, however, both present and dislocated, took some comfort in rec-

ognizing a familiar landmark that somehow withstood the otherwise almost complete devastation. Battered, but still standing, was the Hancock Bank building on the site the institution has occupied for more than one hundred years.

The history of Hancock Bank has been significantly intertwined with the history of Hancock County throughout the twentieth century. During the final months of the nineteenth century, it was recognized that Hancock County, with its growing economy, could no longer function efficiently without a bank. Bay St. Louis, in its capacity as the seat of county government and trade cen-

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THE

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

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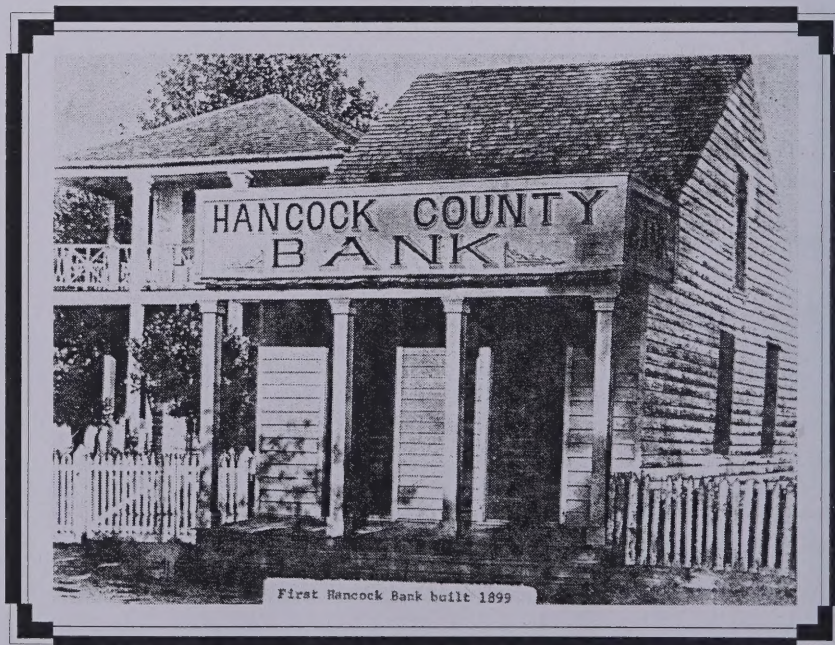
"TO PRESERVE THE GENERAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY AND TO PRESERVE THE KATE LOBRANO HOUSE AND COLLECTIONS THEREIN; TO RESEARCH AND INTERPRET LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY; AND TO ENCOURAGE AN APPRECIATION OF AND INTEREST IN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION."

ter for the area's flourishing lumber business and new seafood canning industry, seemed the obvious location for the county's first bank. Accordingly, in August of 1899, a number of Hancock County citizens met at the county courthouse and organized a bank to serve the people of the county. Those in attendance included J. A. Breath, Joseph F. Cazeneuve, L. A. de Montluzin, the brothers George H. and Frank B. Dunbar, Thomas L. Evans, John B. Fahey, Peter Hellwige and his son Peter E. Hellwige, E. F. Hoffman, August Kellar, Charles Marshall, Richard Mendes, Charles G. Moreau, John Osoinach, Mrs. Agnes T. Phillips, Eugene H. Roberts, L. N. C. Spotorno, and John V. Toulme. These persons represented 198 shares, and on the same evening of organization, a board of nine directors was chosen. Selected as the new bank's first president was Peter Hellwige, an investment broker

from New Orleans who lived in Bay St. Louis.

On October 9, 1899, a little less than three months before the beginning of the twentieth century, the Hancock County Bank opened for business with a paid-up capital of \$10,000 and deposits totaling \$8,337.41. The first Hancock Bank building was a small cottage-like frame structure and was located on "the front" on a plot of ground near and later owned by St. Joseph's Academy. The new bank rented this structure that had previously been used as the City Hall for \$7.00 per month.

Within weeks of signing the bank's charter, the original board of directors purchased a site at Main Street and South Beach Boulevard and began construction of Bay St. Louis' first two story commercial building to house the Hancock County Bank, the post office, and the United States Custom Office. And it is this building that still



First Hancock Bank built 1899

stands today, having survived more than its share of natural disasters. Although the bank's charter was amended in the early 1930's to move the bank's domicile to Gulfport, this original building served as the main Bay St. Louis branch until Hurricane Katrina and will do so again when its current restoration is complete.

MIGRATION OF THOSE WHO SETTLED HANCOCK COUNTY

By
Marco Giardino and
Russell Guerin

Edited by
Eddie Coleman

Much can be learned from the study of early census information. Although the earliest settlers—the French and Spanish—arrived by water, others arrived overland from the eastern seaboard after the Louisiana Purchase. In an analysis of what is now Hancock County, it should be considered that until 1840 Hancock included present-day Harrison and Stone Counties and until 1880 parts of Pearl River County. Even though it is not always apparent where any particular family lived, there are sufficient patterns to shed light on the area.

A study of the 1850 census of Hancock County reveals some interesting statistics. It was the first census to record each individual's place of birth by state, territory, or country. Apparently the population was



Elmwood—Cowand Plantation House

comprised of a very diverse group, representing fifteen countries—among them the British Isles, Russia, Greece, Denmark, and Holland—and eighteen states—including Vermont, New York, New Jersey, Maine, Delaware, Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. Because each child's place of birth is listed, one can almost follow the trek from distant places to Hancock County, sometimes a journey of a year or more. Particularly interesting is the number born originally in the Carolinas. South Carolina natives number fifty-one, and North Carolina has a count of twenty-six. While the numbers themselves may not appear large, there are two reasons why they stand out. First, it must be considered that there are only thirty-one other places of birth listed and that many of these settlers were in fact native to Mississippi. The second reason for taking notice of the Carolinians

is that they do seem to comprise an inordinate percentage of the more prominent citizens. This is reflective of those who owned larger amounts of real estate and the higher number of slaves.

The question arises as to whether the migration was a movement *to* somewhere or *away* from some place. Was the reason for the move cheap land, regardless of the mosquitoes and the supposed "fevers" of the southern swamps and marshlands? Although all records of land sales were lost in the 1853 fire which destroyed the courthouse at Gainesville, there is evidence from the U. S. land office at Natchez that land in the area was sold in the 1830's for \$1.25 per acre with a minimum purchase of eighty acres required.

Or were there other reasons for migration?

DeBow's Review, written by James D. B. DeBow, offers some answers. In the 1840's there was a "severe and long



Laurel Wood—Claiborne Plantation House

drought” in South Carolina and Georgia which heavily affected the cotton crop. Comparison of these crops of North Carolina and New Orleans from 1840—1849 shows North Carolina with an average of ten thousand pounds to that of about one million pounds in New Orleans. DeBow further shows that the “natural increase” of slaves in North Carolina diminished sharply from 1810 to 1840 because “their owners [took them] to a soil producing 1800 pounds [of cotton] instead of 1200 pounds.”

It may be assumed that the Carolinians brought with them something besides money and slaves: they probably also introduced Sea Island cotton into the area. This was long staple cotton of strong fibers, highly prized in the marketplace. Considering that cotton growing was not one of the major industries in coastal Mississippi, it may be surprising to learn that there were several Sea Island cotton plantations in Hancock

County during the 19th century. Among them were the Cowand, Clifton, and Claiborne Plantations.

Cowand Plantation was located on the Bay of St. Louis and comprised 550 acres. Elmwood, the manor house standing until Hurricane Katrina, is believed to have been built in the early nineteenth century, perhaps as early as 1803.

Another was Clifton Plantation on Mulatto Bayou, operated by Judge Lewis Daniells after he arrived from North Carolina. It seems to have been a going operation in 1852 when Benjamin Wailes, the state geologist, visited the area and described in detail the ginning operation of the plantation. He also mentioned that Daniells had sold his cotton for fifty cents per pound and that “it brings upon an average of three times as much as the short staple cotton.” Earlier, the *Gainesville Advocate* (May 19, 1846) reported,

“Hancock claims the finest specimen of sea island cotton exhibited in the Liverpool [England] market last year. It was grown on the plantation of Judge Daniells.”

Adjacent to the Clifton land was Laurel Wood, the highly successful plantation of J. F. H. Claiborne. Sea Island cotton was also the major crop of the Claiborne operation.

Whether from the sea or over land, immigrants into Hancock County came for a variety of reasons to this rich Gulf Coast area. They traveled from Europe and other continents or from the thirteen original states. Regardless of their reasons for coming and regardless of their points of origin, they brought with them commercial, agricultural, and cultural designs, concepts, and outlooks which have blended to make present-day Hancock County such a diverse society.

De Bow's Review

James D. B. De Bow began this magazine in New Orleans in 1846 as the *Commercial Review of the South and West*. He moved it to Washington, D. C., between 1853 and 1857 (during his tenure as Head of the U. S. Census). By the start of the Civil War it was the most widely circulated southern periodical.

De Bow wrote much of each issue himself. Born in Charleston, S. C., he was an ardent champion of slavery; his review even published an article in the 1850's that urged the South to resume the African slave trade.

www.iath.virginia.edu/utc/proslav/debowshp.html

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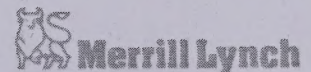
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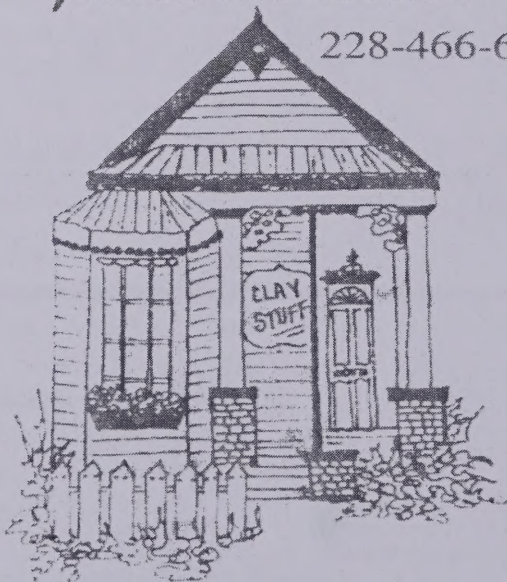
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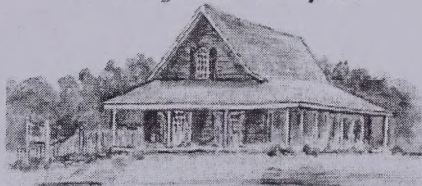
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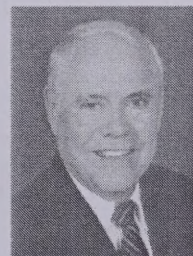
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